



The Myth of Prometheus: Its Survival and Metamorphoses up to the Eighteenth Century

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THE MYTH OF PROMETHEUS

Its survival and metamorphoses up to the eighteenth century

By Olga Raggio

Among the numerous studies concerned with the survival of mythological figures there is none on the forms and the transformations of the myth of Prometheus in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.¹ Yet the old Titan has persistently appealed to the imagination of artists and poets, especially since Goethe, and after him the great Romantics, Byron, Shelley, Longfellow, Nietzsche, saw in him the embodiment of their ideals of freedom and rebellion. In the present study we hope to show that before the middle of the eighteenth century the "fire-bringing god" had appeared in quite a different light.

The Greek sources—Hesiod, Aeschylus and Plato—already diverge at two points: the moral judgment upon Prometheus' theft and the nature of the fire brought by him to mankind. Their texts, on which later authors were to rely, determine the controversial character of the myth.

Hesiod inserts the story of Prometheus into a systematic and pessimistic account of the origins of mankind. To him the Titan is the destroyer of a happy original state, a golden age when men lived "remote and free from toil and heavy sickness." By the fraudulent division of sacrificial meats at Mecone, and by stealing fire from heaven to give to man, he brought the just wrath of Zeus upon himself and the human race. While men received the

¹ A history of the myth of Prometheus has been written only for antiquity. Besides the chapter devoted to a still fundamental analysis of the myth in Preller's *Griechische Mythologie*, and the articles referring to Prometheus in the classical dictionaries by Baumeister, Daremberg and Saglio, and Roscher, the reader interested in the iconography of the myth in antiquity should consult N. Terzaghi, *Monumenti di Prometeo*, in Milani, *Studi e Materiali*, 1902, p. 199 ff., and M. Guarducci, *Leggende dell' antica Grecia relative all' origine dell' umanità*, in *Atti della R. Accademia Naz. di Lincei*, CCCXXIII, 1926 (Serie VI, *Memorie della classe di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche*, II), p. 421 ff. As for the Mediaeval, Renaissance and Baroque ages the subject has not yet been investigated, if we except a few incidental remarks in C. Borinski, *Die Antike in Poetik und Kunsttheorie*, Leipzig, 1914-24; in Jean Seznec, *La Survivance des Dieux Antiques*, 1940—a book whose methodological approach has proved of fundamental inspiration for the present study; and the numerous references to the story of Prometheus in relation to that of Pandora in the recent book by Dora and Erwin Panofsky, *Pandora's Box*, New York, 1956. Mention should be made, finally, of A. Pigler's *Barock-*

themen published at Budapest in 1956 by the Ungarischen Akademie der Wissenschaften. This iconographical lexicon, which contains an extensive listing of representations of the Prometheus story classified according to the four main episodes of the myth, unfortunately came out after the manuscript of this paper had been submitted to this *Journal*. It is especially useful for it includes many minor paintings, drawings and engravings whose inclusion in the present systematic study of the subject did not seem necessary. In many cases, these minor representations are quoted from antiquated sources, and the actual whereabouts of these works of art must still be ascertained. Those which were new to me and of which I was able to find photographs seem to fall entirely within the representational pattern that I have tried to trace. I wish to express here my deepest gratitude to Dr. Erwin Panofsky, who suggested the subject of this study in a seminar at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, 1951, and patiently followed its growth with innumerable illuminating suggestions. My special thanks are due also to Professor G. Bing and Dr. L. D. Ettlinger of the Warburg Institute for kindly replying to several queries.

burden of all their evils with Pandora, Prometheus was fastened upon the summit of the Caucasus where an eagle devoured his eternally regrowing liver, until Heracles appeared to free him from his torture.²

Quite different is the version of Aeschylus, two centuries later. From its benefactor Prometheus mankind receives not only the physical fire in the fennel stalk, but also the subtler fire of reason and wisdom from which all aspects of human civilization are derived: divination, astrology, medicine, mathematics, the alphabet, agriculture—every science and every art.³ His torture on the summit of Mount Caucasus may still be as in Hesiod the just punishment of a sacrilegious *ὕβρις*, but it is also a tragic apotheosis, the symbol of a sharp opposition between the order of Zeus and the independent power of the human reason.

The dangerous implications of the Aeschylean tragedy are absent from the version given by Plato in the *Protagoras*.⁴ After the gods have moulded men and other living creatures with a mixture of clay and fire, the two brothers Epimetheus and Prometheus are called to complete the task and distribute among the newly born creatures all sorts of natural qualities. Epimetheus sets to work, but, being unwise, distributes all the gifts of nature among the animals, leaving men naked and unprotected, unable to defend themselves and to survive in a hostile world. Prometheus then steals the fire of creative power from the workshop of Athena and Hephaistos and gives it to mankind. But creative power (*τεχνή*), although it is the source of all mechanical arts, and is superior to mere natural instinct (*φύσις*), is not sufficient to protect men against discord and war; only the virtues of reverence and justice can provide for the maintenance of a civilized society—and these virtues are the highest gift finally bestowed on men in equal measure.

Besides the literary tradition there was also in antiquity an iconographical tradition. We may try to distinguish here its main types, so as to draw the appropriate background to its post-classical developments.

Two particular episodes captivated the visual imagination of the Greeks: the torture on the Caucasus and the liberation. The first motif was the most ancient. Its type is recognizable on a Greek gem roughly contemporary with the Hesiodic poems,⁵ showing the Titan with his hands tied behind his back, crouching in front of the “long-winged bird.” Later the same image is often represented on Roman gems of the Augustan age.⁶

The episode of the liberation of Prometheus was often depicted on Attic and Etruscan vases as early as the sixth and fifth centuries B.C. Usually Prometheus is crouching on the ground, facing the eagle, while Hercules advances from behind him, shooting his arrows at the bird. Such is the depiction we find on an amphora in the Museum at Karlsruhe,⁷ or on another in Berlin.⁸ But in the fourth century, perhaps under the influence of actual theatrical representations of Aeschylus’ trilogy, another composition came

² *Works and Days*, v. 42-89; *Theogony*, v. 507-616.

³ *Prometheus Bound*, v. 436-506.

⁴ *Protagoras*, 320 ff.

⁵ Furtwängler, *Die Antiken Gemmen*, 1910, I, pl. V, no. 37.

⁶ Furtwängler, *op. cit.*, pl. XXXVII, nos. 40, 41, 45, 46.

⁷ Terzaghi, fig. 7.

⁸ O. Jahn, *Archäologische Beiträge*, Berlin, 1847, pl. VIII (Amphora from Chiusi).

into fashion: it showed the Titan "crucified" on a high rock symbolizing the Caucasus (inside which the actor could hide while reciting the part of Prometheus), one of his legs bent and supporting the eagle, while Hercules, bow in hand, arrived from the side.⁹ An outstanding example of this composition may probably be recognized in a group from the great altar of Zeus at Pergamon (second century B.C.). Replicas of it were made in Roman times on engraved gems and in larger compositions, such as a fresco in the House of the Coloured Capitals in Pompeii (Pl. 4c),¹⁰ or a painting from a Columbarium near Villa Pamphili,¹¹ now at the Museo Nazionale in Rome.

The reacceptance of Prometheus into Olympus was seldom represented. It may even not have been known at all to Greek artists, for we find it only on two Etruscan mirrors.¹² One of them (Pl. 4a) shows Prometheus crowned with laurel, seated between Hercules Kallinikos and Pollux, one holding a finger ring, the other one a ring stone, both symbols of Prometheus' punishment which, as we shall see, was an extremely popular feature in the Roman version of the myth.

Although the fable of the Promethean creation of man must have been generally known in Athens in the fourth century, for we find it incidentally mentioned in Menander and Philemon,¹³ it is significant that it did not inspire any great literary or artistic creation among the Greeks, nor was it represented by them in any visual form.¹⁴

On the other hand, the story enjoyed considerable success at the periphery of the Greek world.¹⁵ In the third and second centuries B.C. it was often represented on Etruscan or Italic gems, e.g. on a scarab in the British Museum, where Prometheus is assembling a human skeleton (Pl. 4b); or on an engraved stone in the Berlin Museum, where he is shaping a human figure, flanked by a sheep and a horse which, presumably, he has just finished modelling.¹⁶

The myth of Prometheus as the shaper of mankind and other living creatures took root firmly in the culture of the Romans, as we may see from the Latin poets of the Augustan age. Ovid opens his *Metamorphoses* with the picture of the first days of the humans shaped with clay and water by Prometheus in the image of the gods; Horace fancies that Prometheus in creating man bestowed on him a great many qualities peculiar to other animals; Catullus and Propertius, in complaining about human nature, call it the imperfect

⁹ See Milchhöfer, *Die Befreiung des Prometheus in Berliner Winckelmanns-Programme*, 1882, p. 1 ff., where this group was for the first time identified.

¹⁰ S. Reinach, *Répertoire des Peintures Grecques et Romaines*, 1922, p. 212, fig. 1.

¹¹ Reinach, *op. cit.*, p. 212, fig. 2.

¹² E. Gerhard, *Etruskische Spiegel*, Berlin, 1843-1897, II, 1845, plates 138 and 139; text, III, 1853, pp. 131-134.

¹³ Philemon, in Meineke, *Fragm. Comic. Graecor.*, v. 4, p. 32; Menander, *id.*, p. 231. A much later testimony is that of Pausanias, who reported that at Panopeus in Boeotia the people showed a place where patches of the

clay used by Prometheus could still be seen (*Description of Greece*, X, 4, 4).

¹⁴ K. Kerényi has some interesting comments on this point in his study *Prometheus—Das Griechische Mythologem der Menschlichen Existenz*, 1946.

¹⁵ Furtwängler believes that the myth may have been diffused thanks to the influence of Pythagorean and Orphic doctrines (III, p. 241).

¹⁶ British Museum, H. B. Walters, *Catalogue of the Engraved Gems, Cameos, Greek, Etruscan and Roman in the British Museum*, 1926, nos. 956, 957, 958; Furtwängler, pl. XXI, nos. 56, 59, 60, 61.



a—Apotheosis of Prometheus, Etruscan mirror, Coll. Gerhard (p. 46)



b—Prometheus building up the figure of a man; Graeco-Roman gem, III-II cent. B.C., British Museum (p. 46)



c—The Liberation of Prometheus; Fresco from the House of the Coloured Capitals, Pompeii (p. 46)



d—Prometheus shaping the figure of a woman; Relief, Vatican Museum (p. 47)



e—The Creation of Man; Sarcophagus, 3rd cent., Louvre (p. 47)



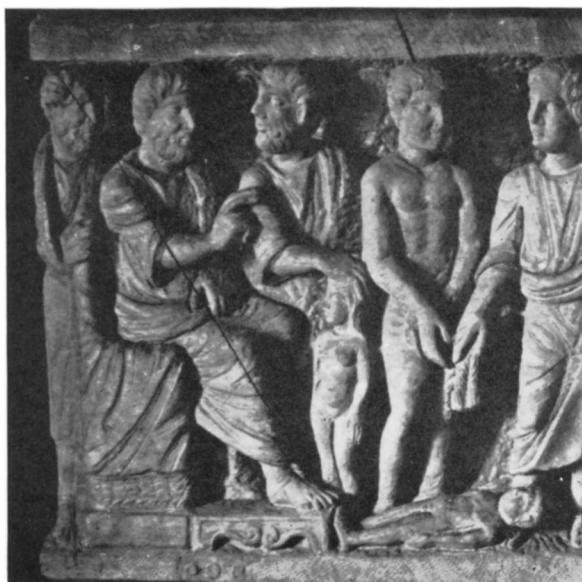
f—The Creation of Man; Sarcophagus, 3rd cent., Louvre (p. 47)



a—Prometheus shaping the body of a man; Sarcophagus, Capitoline Museum, Rome (p. 47)



b—The Workshop of Vulcan; left side of sarcophagus in (a) (p. 47)



c—The Trinity blessing the new man; detail of the "Dogma Sarcophagus," Lateran Museum, Rome (p. 48)



d—Hercules liberating Prometheus; right side of sarcophagus in (a) (p. 47)

work of Prometheus; and the writers of the Silver Age all at some point mention "Prometheus *figulus*" as a familiar figure.¹⁷

* * *

About the third century A.D. the texts of Hesiod, Aeschylus and Plato and the visual monuments appear to be so tinged with allegorical and historicorationalistic interpretations that the survival of the figure of Prometheus must be followed along several well-determined streams of tradition. Visually, the most important evolution of the Roman idea of Prometheus as creator of the human race is represented by its influence upon the iconography of the Biblical Genesis.

In the Graeco-Roman world of the first Christian centuries the myth of Prometheus plays the rôle of a sort of "Genesis secundum Gentiles." The scene of the creation of man is frequently represented not only on gems but also on other objects, *e.g.* a glass cup, discovered in a Roman tomb at Cologne.¹⁸ But the most elaborate versions appear on pagan sarcophagi.¹⁹

A second- or third-century relief in the Vatican Museum²⁰ shows a bearded Prometheus sitting on a rock and giving the final touch to the figure of a woman; to the left Mercury approaches leading a winged *Anima*, and the three Parcae preside over the scene; a little farther away are a bull, a donkey, a lamb and the figures of men and women, all evidently shaped by Prometheus (Pl. 4d). A similar subject is represented in the more crowded compositions dealing with the eternal journey of man from birth to death that decorate two sarcophagi in the Louvre²¹ (Pl. 4e, f), and another in the Museo Nazionale in Naples²² (Pl. 6d), all of them of the third century.

The most important of this group of pagan monuments is the well-known Capitoline sarcophagus, from the Villa Doria Pamphili (Pl. 5a). A handsome example of Roman funerary sculpture of its time, this sarcophagus harmoniously combines the Platonic episode of the fire stolen from the workshop of Vulcan (Pl. 5b) and the Aeschylean scene of the liberation of Prometheus (represented according to the Greek iconographical tradition of the Altar of Pergamon) (Pl. 5d) with an elaborate depiction of the journey of the soul. The treatment of the creation of man corresponds in all these sarcophagi to the dualistic concept of body and soul proper to Platonic and Neoplatonic philosophy. In three distinct phases, it shows the shaping of the

¹⁷ Ovid, *Metam.* I, 78 ff.: *Natus homo est, sive hunc divino semine fecit / Ille opifex rerum, mundi melioris origo, / Sive recens tellus seductaque nuper ab alto / Aethere cognati retinebat semina coeli / Quam satus Japeto, mixtam pluvialibus undis / Finxit in effigiem moderantum cuncta deorum . . .*; Horace, *Carm.* I, 3; I, 16; Catullus, *Carm.* 64, 294; Propertius, *Eleg.*, 3, 5; 2, 1; Juvenal, 4, 135; I, 5, 84; Martial, 10, 39, 4; Valerius Flaccus, *Argon.*, 4, 58-81.

¹⁸ F. Fremersdorf, *Figürlich geschliffene Gläser, Eine Kölner Werkstatt des 3. Jhd.*, 1951 (Römisch-Germanische Forschungen, 9),

no. 4, Taf. 4-5.

¹⁹ For an analysis of this group of sarcophagi and a detailed discussion of their Neoplatonic elements and of their relation to contemporary Christian monuments, see F. Gerke, *Die christlichen Sarcophage der vor-constantinischen Zeit*, 1940.

²⁰ W. Amelung, *Die Sculpturen des Vatikanischen Museums*, 1903, II, no. 353.

²¹ C. Robert, *Die Antiken Sarcophag-reliefs*, III, nos. 351, 356.

²² Robert, no. 357.

body of the new man, which is performed by Prometheus in the rôle of a sculptor, his enlivenment, through fire applied to the lifeless body by a winged genius, and his animation, through the intervention of Minerva who brings the soul in the shape of a butterfly or a bee.

The Prometheus myth of creation as a visual symbol of the Neoplatonic concept of human nature, illustrated in these sarcophagi, was evidently a contradiction of the Christian teaching of a unique and simultaneous act of creation by the Trinity. A simple borrowing of the visual symbol, as it happened in other instances, might in this case have led to a grave dogmatic error, a fact which did not escape the attention of the Fathers: *Deus unicus qui universa condiderit, qui hominem de humo struxerit: hic enim est verus Prometheus*, wrote Tertullian,²³ vigorously stressing difference and similarity between Prometheus and the Lord.

In fact, the subject of the creation of Adam appears very rarely on Christian sarcophagi of the third and fourth centuries.²⁴ In the few existing instances the dogmatic rigour of Roman examples is striking when compared with the looser treatment of the provincial products. On the so-called "Dogma sarcophagus" of the Lateran Museum (Pl. 5c), the artist has represented the three Persons of the Trinity simultaneously blessing the new man, in an odd effort to adapt an old compositional scheme to the new ideological content, possibly under the influence of the contemporary Trinitarian dispute. But on other examples the prototype of Prometheus is more easily recognizable. On a sarcophagus of the Church at Mas d'Aire²⁵ the soul is symbolized by a dove hovering over the head of Adam while the Lord extends his arm in a gesture of blessing—a composition that recalls the scene depicted on the Capitoline sarcophagus. On a coarsely carved relief from Campli (Teramo),²⁶ the Lord sits on a throne and models the body of Adam, exactly like Prometheus. Even on the "sarcophagus of Ciriaca" at Naples (Pl. 6a),²⁷ the way in which the Lord animates Eve by imposing his two fingers in a V shape on her eyes is a clear continuation of the tradition that gave the same gesture to Prometheus on a Hellenistic relief now in the Louvre (Pl. 6b).

The influence of the iconographical tradition of Prometheus may perhaps be seen also in late antique Bible illustrations. It has long been recognized that the Cotton Genesis, before it was burnt, showed the story of man in three distinct scenes—the creation, enlivenment and animation of Adam.²⁸ Nor does this seem to have been an isolated phenomenon: illustrations in Carolingian Bibles from the school of Tours—the Grandval Bible (B.M. MS. Add. 10546) and the Vivian Bible (Bibl. Nat. lat. 1) are, as Koehler has shown, clearly derived from a fifth-century Byzantine MS. in which the miniatures must have been similar in arrangement and style to those of the Cotton Genesis.²⁹ Especially in the Grandval Bible (Pl. 6c), the figure of

²³ *Apologeticum* XVIII, 3.

²⁴ J. Wilpert, *I Sarcophagi Cristiani*, II, 1932, p. 226, mentions only five reliefs with scenes referring to the creation of man.

²⁵ Wilpert, I, pl. LXV, 5.

²⁶ Wilpert, I, pl. CVI, 2.

²⁷ See Gerke, p. 190 ff.

²⁸ K. Weitzmann, *Illustration in Roll and Coder*, 1947, pp. 176-178, and "Die Illustrationen der Septuaginta," in *Münchener Jahrbuch*, 1952-53, pp. 115-116, figs. 18-23.

²⁹ W. Koehler, *Die Karolingischen Miniaturen—Die Schule von Tours*, 1933, I, part 2, p. 186 ff.

the Lord bending over the body of the lifeless Adam resembles that of Prometheus on third-century pagan sarcophagi (Pl. 6d).³⁰

In the fourteenth century the image of Prometheus enlivening man with a spark of the divine fire reappears in the illustrations of the *Ovide moralisé*, where the story of the Titan is understood as a “fable qui à l’histoire est accordable” and is accompanied by details learned from Servius:

Li fils Japeti sans doutance
 Prometheus qui mout savoit
 De terre et d’iaue, fet avoit
 Une ymagete a la semblance
 Des dieus, qui toute ont la puissance
 de Toutes choses ordener.
 La glose dist que, pour donner
 A l’ymage esperit de vie,
 Ot du chars du Solail ravie
 Une luisante paille enflammee
 Dont il ot l’image animee.
 Et tout aient les autres bestes
 Vers la terre inclines les testes,
 Haut visage a homme donna.
 Tel le fist et tel l’ordonna
 Que le ciel voie a son voulo,
 S’aille a deus pies, dreciez vers l’air.³¹

A manuscript of the Bibliothèque de la Ville at Lyons (MS. 742 f. 1), dated about 1325-50, shows both God and Prometheus, the first creating Chaos, the second “animating” with a flaming torch the inert figure of a man lying on the ground, surrounded by the Creation, animals, plants, and even a few houses (Pl. 7b). In another manuscript, illuminated some fifty years later, now in the Bibliothèque Nationale (MS. Fr. 871, f. 31) the Creation (Pl. 6e) is represented in four scenes: God creating Chaos, the creation of the plants and animals, Prometheus animating Adam in much the same way as in the Lyons Manuscript, and God creating Eve.³² This gradual fusion between the Biblical and the mythological representation corresponds well with the moral interpretation that saw in Prometheus a prefiguration of the true God. It is maintained throughout the numerous French and Italian illustrated editions of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In the Italian Ovid of 1497 a serious effort to appear “classical” is made by the designer of the woodcuts (Pl. 8f). But very soon a reaction to this tendency takes place, and in the editions printed at Lyons about the middle of the sixteenth century

³⁰ Koehler (pp. 190-2) suggests that the copyist from Tours may have used a manuscript of the seventh century that in its turn depended on a Bible illustrated at the time of Pope Leo the Great (430-471) when the mosaics of the arch of Santa Maria Maggiore were under way.

³¹ *Ovide Moralisé*, ed. by C. de Boer, in *Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen te Amsterdam, Verhandelingen, Afd. Letterkunde*,

n.s., XV (1915). The date of the poem is given by J. Engels, *Etudes sur l’Ovide Moralisé* (Diss. Gröningen 1945), p. 48.

³² M. D. Henkel, *Die Illustrierten Ausgaben Ovids Metamorphosen*, in *Vorträge d. Bibl. Warburg*, 1926-27, p. 58 ff. I am especially indebted to Dr. Ettlinger for detecting the representations of these two manuscripts and for sending me photographs.

the woodcuts of Bernard Salomon are an unmistakable and significant adaptation of Michelangelo's Creation of Adam (Pl. 7e).

* * *

While the Roman representation of Prometheus *plasticator* is thus absorbed into Christian iconography, the other episodes of the legend disappear from the art of the High Middle Ages. Only their memory is preserved by the texts in which the traditions of historical and allegorical interpretation are carried on. It is, perhaps, surprising that the story of Prometheus, unlike so many of the ancient myths that remained familiar to the Middle Ages through illuminated astrological manuscripts, is altogether absent from this type of literature.³³ But, on the other hand, it appears almost constantly, as we shall see, in the universal histories, as well as in the mythological and allegorical handbooks which in a debased way continue the late classical tradition.

A number of rationalistic explanations of the myth were already known in antiquity. As early as the fifth century B.C. the historian Herodorus of Heraclea had identified Prometheus with a Scythian king who, when a sudden flood of the river Aetos (eagle) had ruined his country, had been thrown into chains by his rebellious subjects.³⁴ This interpretation reappears in Diodorus Siculus, according to whom Prometheus was a governor of Egypt at the time of Osiris, and Aetos was one of the early names of the Nile. As to the torture of Prometheus, it was not one inflicted by his subjects, but rather a symbol of the deep grief from which he was relieved only when Heracles turned the river back into its former course and stopped the flood.³⁵

Another passage in Diodorus³⁶ mentions Prometheus as the inventor of the flint-stone—an euhemeristic explanation of the myth. Likewise Prometheus is characterized as the father of philosophy by Theophrastus,³⁷ the inventor of gymnastics by Philostratus,³⁸ or the first man to discover how to store and carry fire in a fennel stalk, or to teach men to wear rings on their fingers, by Pliny.³⁹

Parallel to these explanations was the tendency derived from the Stoics to discover a symbolic meaning in the myth. Prometheus' torture is referred to as an inspiring example of heroic endurance by Cicero,⁴⁰ Plutarch sees in the Titan an embodiment of human reason,⁴¹ and at the close of antiquity a complex allegorical version and interpretation is devised by Plotinus. For him the fable is a fitting image of his theory about the creative process by which Divine Providence engenders and illuminates the human soul. Not Hephaestus, as Hesiod tells us, but Prometheus himself (or Divine Providence) is the creator of Pandora—the soul—enriched with all sorts of gifts from the

³³ This is all the more surprising, as Prometheus is mentioned by Hyginus in *Fabulae*, 142-4, and *Astronomicon* II, 15.

³⁴ Herodorus Heracleensis, in *Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum*, ed. C. Müller, Berlin, 1885, II, p. 34, no. 23.

³⁵ *Bibliotheca historica*, I, 19.

³⁶ *Bibl.*, V, 67.

³⁷ *Schol. Apoll.* I, 1248.

³⁸ *Gymn.* 16.

³⁹ *Nat. Hist.* XXXVII, 1, 2: "Fabulae primordium a rupe Caucasi tradunt, Promethei vinculorum interpretatione fatali, primumque saxi eius fragmentum inclusum ferro ac digito circumdatum; hoc fuisse anulum et hoc gemmam."

⁴⁰ *Tusculan. Disput.* II, 10.

⁴¹ *De Fortuna*, 98.

gods. The chains that fetter him on Mount Caucasus "signify that he is in some way held by his own creation." But such chains are only apparent, and "the release by Heracles tells that there is power in Prometheus so that he need not remain in bonds."⁴²

Both the late classical pagan authors and the Fathers combine the allegorical and euhemeristic interpretations of the myth. Servius on *Caucaseasque refert volucres furtumque Promethei* (Ecl. vi. 42) is important for our story. According to him, Prometheus shaped men and then, with Minerva's assistance, stole fire from the wheels of the Sun's chariot and brought it to mankind. As a punishment the gods sent fever and disease to the human race and Prometheus was chained by Mercury to the Caucasus, condemned to have his heart devoured by an eagle.⁴³ The meaning of the *fabula* is that Prometheus was a wise man (*vir prudentissimus*) who observed from the summit of the Caucasus the course of the stars and taught astrology to the Assyrians. The eagle is a symbol of the worries besetting his heart, and fire is said to be stolen from heaven, because Prometheus understood the nature of lightning. Mercury is the god of prudence and reason. Finally, the diseases sent to mankind signify that as long as men used their ingenuity to a good purpose they profited by it; but when they misused it and turned it to evil ends, they were justly punished.

Among the writers of the Church, the euhemeristic method provided both a satisfactory conciliation with the classical cultural heritage, and a handy argument against any dangerous idealization of the old gods. Moreover, the *Book of Wisdom* (xiv. 15-20), where the first deviser of idols is made indirectly responsible for the spread of idolatry,⁴⁴ provided an excellent Biblical parallel to the legend of Prometheus *plasticator*. The natural outcome was to explain the old Titan as having been the first sculptor, and therefore to condemn him as the maker of the first idols. Lactantius provides an example: "Primum omnium simulacrum formasse de pingui et molli luto ab eoque primo natam esse artem et statuas et simulacra fingendi," a text often literally echoed by mediaeval writers.⁴⁵ Isidore of Seville makes Prometheus live in the Third Age, at the time of Isaac, and teach men how to make images and wear rings on the fourth finger.⁴⁶ In this disguise the Titan entered mediaeval mythology, along with Mercury, Atlas, Minerva and other "inventor gods." In the ninth century Ado of Vienne wrote in his *Chronique des Six Ages du Monde* that at the time of Isaac "it is said, lived Prometheus, who is believed to have fashioned men out of clay; his brother, Atlas, living at the same time, was

⁴² *Enneades* IV, 3, 14.

⁴³ *P. Vergili Maronis Opera cum Commentariis*, Venice, 1538: "Prometheus Iapeti et Clymenae filius post factos a se homines dicitur auxilio Minervae coelum ascendisse et adhibita facula (ferula?) ad rotam solis ignem furatus, quem hominibus indicavit. Ob quam causam irati dii duo mala immisserunt terris, febres et morbos (aut feminas et morbos), sicut et Sappho et Hesiodus memorant."

⁴⁴ "Also the singular diligence of the arti-

ficer did help to set forward the ignorant to more superstition. For he, peradventure willing to please one in authority, forced all his skill to make the resemblance of the best fashion. And so the multitude, allured by the grace of the work, took him now for a god, which a little before was but honoured as a man." (*Sap.* XIV, 18-20.)

⁴⁵ *Divinae Institutiones, De Origine Erroris*, caps. XI and XXV.

⁴⁶ *Etymologiae* VIII, 11; XVI, 6; XIX, 32.

regarded as a great astrologer; the grandson of Atlas, Mercury, was a sage skilled in several arts. For this reason, the vain error of his contemporaries placed him after his death among the gods.”⁴⁷

An interesting combination of the different views we have reported is offered in the twelfth century by Petrus Comestor, and repeated frequently by subsequent compilers. In his *Historia Scholastica* (1178) he explains that Prometheus was said to have created men either because he made statues that, by some mysterious device, could walk (*automata*) or, perhaps, because he brought civilization to a human race still in the brutal state of nature (*de rudibus doctos fecit*). Moreover, the author cursorily mentions the invention of the iron ring to be worn on the fourth finger, a detail he has from Isidore.⁴⁸

The *Historia Scholastica* was one of the most read, translated and adapted books of the Middle Ages. It may well have been the source of the numerous compendia of pagan history organized by dynasties that begin to appear frequently in the thirteenth century, such as Giovanni Colonna’s *Mare Historiarum*, synoptic genealogies such as an *Abrogé des Histoires Divines* (Morgan 751), or even a *Généalogie de Jésus Christ* (Morgan 367), where by an amusing confusion the name of Prometheus appears among the descendants of Noah, that is as the name of the son of Japheth, confused with Japetus. As late as the fifteenth century Prometheus is mentioned in the same way in widely-diffused historical handbooks, such as Roelewinck’s *Fasciculus Temporum* (Cologne, 1473) and Jacopo da Bergamo’s *Supplementum Chronacarum* (Venice, 1486).

On the threshold of the sixteenth century even the humanists bow to this well-established tradition. Polydore Vergil of Urbino devotes a chapter to Prometheus, inventor of rings.⁴⁹ The learned Pomponius Gauricus of Padua lists him as the first sculptor in his *De Sculptura* (Florence, 1504).⁵⁰

A direct reflection of this textual tradition is to be found in the representations of Prometheus that illustrate fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Italian picture chronicles. On the page referring to the great men who lived in the *Tertia Aetas* in the *Imagines pictae virorum illustrium* of Leonardo da Besozzo (ca. 1400), the Titan is represented as a bearded sage of dignified and scholarly appearance, holding a statuette of a man in his left hand and making with the other a gesture of blessing (Pl. 7c). Not unlike Leonardo da Besozzo, and actually following what must have been a common prototype, the draughtsman of the Florentine *Picture Chronicle* in the British Museum places “Prometheus astrologus” at the time of Isaac and King Inachus, and lends him the features of a Ghiberti prophet in the act of holding high the statuette of a man, with an inspired gesture of command (Pl. 7d), a sculptor and a magician at the same time.

The existence of another iconographical tradition, possibly limited to the North, is revealed by a woodcut in Hartmann Schedel’s *Nuremberg Chronicle* (1493). Here Prometheus is represented together with Minerva and Apollo as one of the descendants of Jupiter and wears the draped headgear of a

⁴⁷ *Pat. Lat.*, CXXIII, 35. The English trans. is from J. Seznec, *The Survival of the Pagan Gods*, 1953, p. 15.

⁴⁸ *Historia Scholastica*, Cologne, 1479, f. 30.

⁴⁹ *De Inventoribus libri*, Venice, 1499, cap. XXI.

⁵⁰ Cap. XVI.

a—The Lord animating Eve; Sarcophagus of Ciriaca, Museo Nazionale, Naples (p. 48)



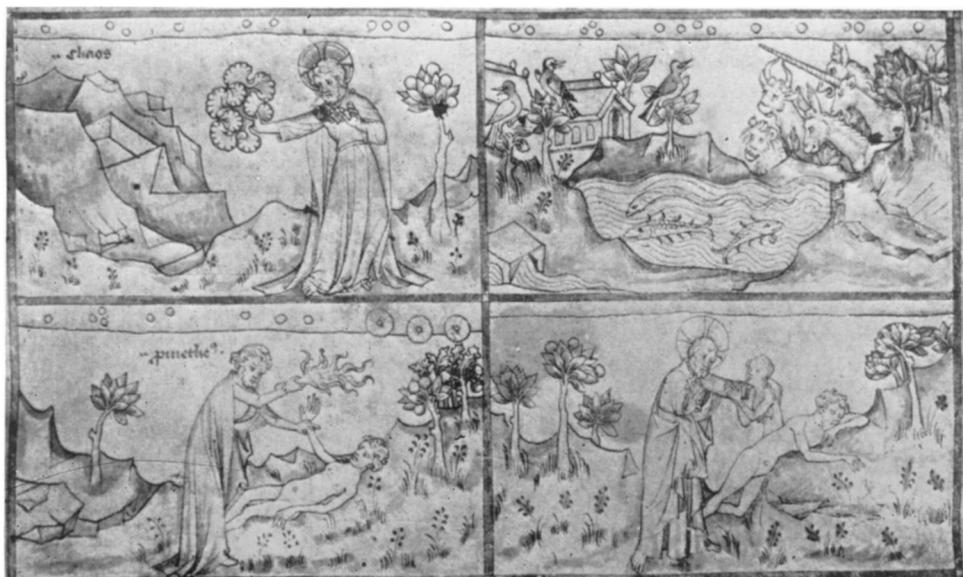
b—Prometheus creating man with the help of Athena; Hellenistic Relief, Louvre (p. 48)



c—The Lord enlivening Adam; Grandval Bible, Brit. Mus. Cod. Add. 10546, f. 5^v (p. 48)



d—Prometheus creating man; detail of sarcophagus, Museo Nazionale, Naples (pp. 47, 49)



e—Prometheus animating man, and scenes of the Creation, from *Ovide Moralise*, Paris, Bibl. Nat. MS. fr. 871, f. 31 (p. 49)

Prometheus



a—Prometheus holding a ring, from Hartman Schedel, *Liber Chronicarum*, Nuremberg, 1493, f. XXVIII (p. 53)



b—Prometheus animating man, from *Ovide Moralise*, Lyons, Bibl. de la Ville MS. 742, f. 1 (p. 49)



c—Prometheus, from Leonardo da Besozzo's *Imagines pictae virorum illustrium*, Crespi Collection, Milan (p. 52)



d—Prometheus, from the Florentine Picture-Chronicle, British Museum (p. 52)



e—Bernard Salomon, Prometheus creating man, from Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Lyons, 1557 (p. 50)



f—The torture of Prometheus, from Cicero, *Tusculanae Quaestiones*, Venice, 1510, II (p. 53)

magister scholae; but instead of holding a statuette he proudly displays a conspicuous finger ring enclosing a very large stone (Pl. 7a). The robes of a scholar are also Prometheus' attribute in a woodcut illustrating Cicero's *Tusculanae* printed in Venice in 1510, where this mediaeval outfit provides an amusing contrast with the Aeschylean context (Pl. 7f).⁵¹

If we now turn from euhemeristic sources to allegorical tradition, we find that one of the most influential late-antique texts is the mythological handbook of Fulgentius Planciades. Here it is explained that the story of Prometheus looking for fire in the heavens to animate the man he has shaped is an allegory of Divine Providence creating man with the assistance of Divine Wisdom. The heavenly fire is an image of the human soul infused with the grace of God. As to the torture of Prometheus, it signifies the human heart devoured by the cares of this world.⁵²

The text of Fulgentius, as well as that of Servius on which it ultimately relies, are the main sources of the mythological handbooks written in the ninth century by the anonymous *Mythographus Primus* and *Mythographus Secundus*.⁵³ Both were used for the more lengthy and elaborate compendium by the English scholar Alexander Neckham (1157-1217), the *Scintillarium Poetarum*, or *Poetarius*. Written at such a late date, Neckham's *Scintillarium* carefully distinguishes allegorical from historical interpretation, but shows an emphasis on moralization that is characteristic of a general attitude towards classical culture in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and of which the most conspicuous examples are the verse *Ovide Moralisé*, and the *Metamorphoses Ovidianae moraliter explanatae* of Pierre Bersuire. The gradual return to a philosophical appreciation of Prometheus who is slowly reinvested with the classical idea of the *sapiens* can be observed in a famous allegorical treatise on the *Metamorphoses*, composed by Giovanni del Virgilio before the first half of the fourteenth century. Prometheus (whose name is understood as *provisio mentis divinae*) is interpreted by the author as that "unum phylosophum qui phylosophatus est hominem factum esse ex terra et inspiratum esse anima de coelis orta."⁵⁴

A direct continuation of this allegorical literature, as well as of the historical interpretations of the Middle Ages, is in the *Genealogiae* of Giovanni Boccaccio. The idea, inherited from antiquity, of a sudden intellectual awakening of mankind in its progression from a brutal natural state towards civilization, of which Petrus Comestor was already aware when he wrote that Prometheus was a sage who *de rudibus doctos fecit*, finds an interesting development in Boccaccio's chapter about the Titan.⁵⁵ Following, as usual, two levels of interpretation, Boccaccio distinguishes between two Prometheuses: for the

⁵¹ L. Baer, *Die illustrierten Historienbücher des XV. Jhd.*, Strasburg, 1903, p. 123, mentions a woodcut illustrating a *Mer des Hystoires* printed by Jean du Pré at Lyons in 1491: "Prometheus: ein Mann in Handwerkstracht ist im Begriffe eine am Boden liegende Figur mit dem Meissel zu bearbeiten; hinten hat man durch eine offene Säulenhalle einen Ausblick ins Freie." I have, unfortunately, not been able to secure a copy of this book.

⁵² *Mitologiae*, ed. R. Helm, Leipzig, 1898, p. 45.

⁵³ Texts in G. H. Bode, *Scriptores Rerum Mythicarum latini libri III*, 1834, and their history in H. Liebeschütz, *Fulgentius Metaphorais* 1928, p. 16 ff.

⁵⁴ Wicksteed & Gardner, *Dante and Giovanni del Virgilio*, 1902, pp. 317-18.

⁵⁵ *Genealogiae deorum gentilium . . .*, Venice, 1494, lib. IV, cap. 44.

first one, we must understand God Himself; for the second, we may rely upon the authors who tell us he was an Assyrian king who learned about the courses of the stars in the solitude of the Caucasus and then taught his science to his people. But this historical Prometheus has also a symbolic, moral significance. To understand it we must bear in mind the existence of three sorts of men, the *homo naturalis*, the *homo civilis*, and the *homo doctus*. Prometheus is the *homo doctus* who sees the imperfection of the *homo naturalis* and by instructing and educating him wishes to bring him to real life, the life of the *homo civilis*, capable of social intercourse, science and virtue. To do this, however, the sage needs the fire of a superior wisdom that can be attained only in the solitude of meditation, and must be paid for by torture and anxiety of mind. In the heavens where all is clarity and truth, he steals, so to speak, a ray of the divine wisdom (*flamمام : idest doctrinae claritatem*) from God Himself, source of all Science, supreme Light of every man. Boccaccio's emphasis upon the innermost spiritual experience of the *sapiens*, and upon his rôle in society, has, in spite of its mediaeval sources, a subtle shift of accent that announces the attitude of the Renaissance humanists.

In the fifteenth century, for the first time after Plotinus, the myth is invested with the dignity of a philosophical symbol, mystical and deeply pessimistic. In his *Quaestiones Quinque de Mente*, written about 1476-77, Marsilio Ficino inserts the story of Prometheus interpreted along the lines of Boccaccio.⁵⁶ However, the opposition between the *homo doctus* and the *homo naturalis* does not interest the philosopher: to him the myth becomes an image of the human soul striving for the supreme truth. The torture of Prometheus is the torment brought by reason itself to man, who is made by it many times more unhappy than the brutes. It is after having stolen one beam of the celestial light and having reached the heights of contemplation that the soul feels as if fastened by chains and "beset by the continuous gnawing of inquiry, the most ravenous of vultures"; only death can release her bonds and carry her to the source of all knowledge, where she "will be entirely filled with the whole light."⁵⁷

The most conspicuous example of the influence both of Boccaccio and of Ficino occurs in Charles de Bouelles' *Liber de Sapiente* (1509), a book that offers a strange combination of scholasticism and Neoplatonic ideas. Bouelles uses the myth of Prometheus as a symbol for illustrating the process by which human nature progresses through the stages of *esse*, *vivere*, *sentire* and *intelligere* in a world conceived in Aristotelian fashion as divided between the two opposite poles of Matter and God. In his system the *homo a natura* (simply *homo* or *insipiens*) becomes *homo ab intellectu* (*homo-homo*), and finally *sapiens* (*homo-homo-homo*), the last stage in which nature finds its supreme exaltation. This *sapiens* is like "that famous Prometheus (who) abandoning the sensible world by the power of his contemplation, having penetrated the royal palace

⁵⁶ *Opera*, Basle, 1576, p. 680, as well as in *Argumentum in Protagoram*, *Opera*, II, p. 1298, and *Argumentum in Philebūm*, *Opera*, II, p. 1231.

⁵⁷ André Chastel has very well expressed the negative attitude of Ficino towards Prometheus in his *Marsile Ficin et l'Art*, 1954,

p. 175: "Le mythe héroïque est défiguré: Prométhée n'est ni un revolte, ni un conquérant; la possession et l'organisation du monde terrestre s'accompagnent du sentiment douleur de ce que cet effort même a d'insuffisant."

of Heaven, and having conceived there the most brilliant fire of wisdom brings it down in his immortal soul, so that the earthly man might acquire strength and soul.”⁵⁸

The idea of the *sapiens Prometheus* is found over and over again in the writers influenced by the Florentine Neoplatonists. It is repeated, for example, with little variation by Ludovico Ricchieri da Rovigo (L. Coelius Rhodiginus) in his *Lectiones Antiquae*,⁵⁹ or by Coelio Calcagnini in an unpublished *Epitome de Prometheo et Epimetheo*.⁶⁰ And even outside the Neoplatonic circle we can detect the influence of Ficino’s comparison. For instance, Pomponazzi writes that the destiny of all philosophers is comparable to the fate of Prometheus and of Proteus: they all must suffer for the sake of their inquiry.⁶¹ But very soon the philosophical symbol receives a sharper religious significance. In his *Symbolicae Questiones*, Achille Bocchi mentions Prometheus, under the motto *Summum bonum praestat fides*, as an example of the knowledge acquired through the illumination of faith, a symbol of mystical rapture. In this sense the Titan is, not unlike Ganymede, essentially opposed to Phaethon or Icarus, symbols of sinful and arrogant curiosity.⁶²

Perhaps the most striking example of the effort to conciliate the world of boundless rational endeavour with the world of faith is found in Erasmus. In his *Antibarbarus* he thunders against the ignorance and the spiritual inertia of the *illiterati* of his day, and in comparing the rapture of Prometheus to that of St. Paul exclaims: *Prometheus est nobis imitandus!*⁶³

This supreme idealization of Prometheus remains, however, more or less strictly confined to a philosophical or humanistic context. As soon as we turn to more popular sources, Prometheus, the pious philosopher, is replaced by Prometheus, the arrogant astrologer. Particularly telling among these sources are the books of emblems, in which mediaeval tradition is tenaciously preserved even under modern appearances.

In 1531 Alessandro Alciati published at Augsburg the first illustrated edition of his *Emblematum Liber*. Under the motto *In Amatores Meretricum* Prometheus was depicted lying on the ground beneath a tree, tortured by the eagle (Pl. 8e), in a fashion not unlike that in which Tityus, punished in Hades for the rape of Latona, had been depicted in a woodcut in the Italian *Metamorphoses* printed in Venice in 1497. From the motto one would say that no distinction was made between the two Titans, for we may recall that Tityus was commonly understood as a symbol of the “tortures caused by immoderate love.”⁶⁴ However, the stanza leaves no doubt as to the intentions of Alciati:

Caucasi aeternum pendens in rupe Prometheus
Diripitur sacri praepetis ungue iecur.

⁵⁸ Ed. by E. Cassirer, *Individuum und Kosmos in der Philosophie der Renaissance*, 1927, pp. 100-103.

⁵⁹ *Antiquarum lectionum libri VII*, Venice, 1516, VII, cap. 19.

⁶⁰ Cod Vat. Lat. 7192, fols. 204-229v. This *Epitome* was discovered by Prof. P. O. Kris-teller and a photostat of it was most kindly

made available to me by Prof. E. Panofsky.

⁶¹ Pomponazzi, *De Fato*, in *Opera*, Basle, 1567, p. 709.

⁶² *Symbolicarum Questionum . . . libri quinque*, Bologna, 1555, Symb. CXXX, p. 287.

⁶³ *Opera Omnia*, Leyden, 1703-1706 col. 1741 ff.

⁶⁴ Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, v. 982.

Et nollet fecisse hominem : figulosque perosus
 Accensam rapto damnat ab igne facem.
 Roduntur variis prudentum pectora curis
 Qui coeli affectant scire, deumque vices.

The definitive edition of the Emblems was printed by Christian Wechel in Paris in 1534; it carried the same stanza, but was preceded by the motto *Astrologia—Quae supra nos nihil ad nos*, and a more modern device (Pl. 8d). The emblem is this time associated with another example of punished pride, the Fall of Icarus, and in this form it is reprinted in the numerous editions throughout the century.⁶⁵ The idea, hardly recognizable as a Renaissance one, that *Curiositas fugienda est* became therefore closely associated with Prometheus. This was true especially outside Italy, where the numerous emblem books that followed Alciati, Barthélemy Aneau's *Picta Poesis* (Lyons, 1555), the *Microcosmus* (1579), Whitney's *Choice of Emblems* (Leyden, 1585, Pl. 10h) or Reusner's *Emblemata* (Frankfurt, 1581), made this negative interpretation widely familiar.⁶⁶

* * *

The familiarity of Renaissance authors with the Prometheus myth undoubtedly accounts for the increased popularity of the subject as an independent "story" to be represented by painters and sculptors. Here the ideal image of the *sapiens Prometheus* in the sense of Boccaccio and Ficino plays an important rôle. A famous example is provided by the two cassone panels painted by Piero di Cosimo about 1510, today in the museums at Munich (Pl. 8a) and at Strasburg (Pl. 8b).⁶⁷ The Munich panel represents the dispute between Epimetheus and Prometheus, the handsome triumphant statue of the new man, modelled by Prometheus, his ascension to the sky under the guidance of Minerva; the Strasburg panel shows in the distance Prometheus lighting his torch at the wheels of the Sun, and in the foreground on one side, Prometheus applying his torch to the heart of the statue and, on the other, Mercury fastening him to a tree. All the details are evidently borrowed from Boccaccio's *Genealogiae*.⁶⁸ Moreover it is interesting to observe that Piero must have found some inspiration in the illustrated Italian Ovid

⁶⁵ From 1540 to 1616 no less than 36 editions were printed. For facsimile reprints of the editions of Augsburg, 1531, and of Paris, 1534, and for general information see H. Green, *Andreae Alciati Emblematum Fontes Quatuor*, London, 1870. For a facsimile reprint of the Lyons edition by Bonhomme, 1551, see H. Green, *A. Alciati Emblematum Flumen Abundans*, London, 1871.

⁶⁶ Thus, a drawing in the British Museum attributed to Karel van Mander (A. E. Popham, *Catalogue of Flemish and Dutch Drawings*, V, p. 169, no. 2), and showing a "crucified" Prometheus, seems to be the direct counterpart of these lines from the *Microcosmus*:

Prométhée s'estant guindé jusques aux cieux
 Pour dérober le feu des redoutables Dieux,
 Pour retribution de ceste outrecuidance
 Fut par eux poursuivi d'une rude vengeance.

Il fut par leur decret à la croix attaché,
 Là où pour expier devenant son péché,
 L'Aigle de Jupiter le becquoitoit sans cesse,
 Si que ce patient estoit en grand oppresse.

⁶⁷ Munich, *Alte Pinakothek, Katalog*, 1930, no. 8973. Strasburg, *Musée des Beaux Arts, Catalogue*, 1932, no. 225.

⁶⁸ E. Panofsky, "The Early History of Man," this *Journal*, VI, 1937, p. 1 ff.; K. Borinski, *Die Deutung der Piero di Cosimo zugeschriebenen Prometheus-Bilder*, Munich, 1921; G. Habich, "Über zwei Prometheus-Bilder," in *Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Sitzungs-*



a—Piero di Cosimo, The Story of Prometheus, c. 1510, Alte Pinakothek, Munich (p. 56)



b—Piero di Cosimo, The Story of Prometheus, c. 1510, Musée des Beaux Arts, Strasburg (p. 56)



By courtesy of the Pierpont Morgan Library

c—Parmigianino, Prometheus animating man, Drawing, Pierpont Morgan Library, New York (p. 57)



d—Illustration from Alessandro Alciati, *Emblemata*, Paris, 1554 (p. 56)



e—Illustration from Alessandro Alciati, *Emblemata*, Augsburg, 1531 (p. 55)



f—Prometheus animating man, from Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Venice, 1479 (pp. 49, 57)



a—Sebastiano de Valentinis, ‘The Torture of Prometheus,’ 1558, Engraving, Albertina, Vienna (p. 57)



b—Garofalo, ‘The Torture of Prometheus,’ 1540, Seminario Arcivescovile, Ferrara (p. 57)



c—Cornelis Cort, ‘The Torture of Prometheus,’ 1566, Engraving after a lost painting by Titian (p. 58)



d—Rubens, ‘The Torture of Prometheus,’ Philadelphia Museum of Art (p. 58)



e—Jordaens, ‘The Torture of Prometheus,’ Wallraf-Richartz Museum, Cologne (p. 58)



f—Theodoor van Baburen, ‘Prometheus Chained by Vulcan,’ Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (p. 58)

printed at Venice in 1497. This is indeed suggested by comparing two details of the Munich panel—the Christ-like type of Prometheus criticizing Epimetheus and the two little figures hovering in the sky on their way to the sun—with the corresponding details in a woodcut in the first book of the *Metamorphoses* (Pl. 8f).

The same passage in the *Genealogiae* may account, in my opinion, for a drawing by Parmigianino in the Pierpont Morgan Library⁶⁹ (Pl. 8c). Here a nobly conceived Prometheus, not unlike Michelangelo's Jehovah, set against a dramatic sky of light and shadow, opens his arms in an all-embracing gesture to reach the sun's chariot and transfer from it directly the enlivening spark to the clay man who sits in front of him, modelled to his size and image. Perhaps no other visualization of the myth in the Renaissance expresses with greater intensity the peculiar blending of classical, mediaeval and Christian implications that were associated with the figure of Prometheus at this time.⁷⁰

In other cases, however, we may recognize the direct influence of ancient texts⁷¹ or of classical compositions, particularly in the representation of the torture of Prometheus. Thus, a detail of the ceiling painted by Garofalo in the Seminario Arcivescovile at Ferrara in 1540, where Prometheus is depicted lying on the seashore, while Oceanos rises from the waves to pity his fate (Pl. 9b), is taken from Aeschylus' tragedy, published in Venice in 1518. A small Paduan or Venetian bronze statuette of the same period, formerly in the Fildor collection, can probably be related to a type to be found on ancient Roman gems. Finally, no direct visual prototype but the text of Aeschylus as well as that of Ficino seems to have inspired the author of a striking engraving, dated 1558, and signed by Sebastiano de' Valentini of Udine, where the Titan is represented with an almost romantic violence of emotion (Pl. 9a), withstanding his torture with the heroic exaltation of a visionary.

Important for the diffusion of the Italian Renaissance type of tortured Prometheus were Michelangelo's drawing of Tityus,⁷² and a painting by Titian. Michelangelo's composition, perhaps classically inspired,⁷³ is an

ber. Philosoph.-philol. und hist. klasse, 1920, abh. 2. Habich and Borinski recognized the subject of the panels and connected them with Boccaccio's *Genealogiae*.

⁶⁹ Pierpont Morgan Drawings, IV, 1912, no. 45.

⁷⁰ The Prometheus drawing can be related to some other drawings by Parmigianino, such as one in the Louvre representing perhaps Ganymede and Hebe (illustrated in A. E. Popham, *The Drawings of Parmigianino*, 1953, Pl. LXII), and another at Castle Ashby, England, representing Ganymede serving nectar to the gods (ill. by Popham, Pl. LXIII). In connection with my interpretation of the Prometheus drawing, it is interesting to note that Mr. Popham, in commenting upon the significance of these two drawings, points out their possible "recondite implication" and wonders whether, for in-

stance, the explanation of a drawing like that of Ganymede serving nectar to the gods should not "be sought in classical mythology directly or in some contemporary literary interpretation of it."

⁷¹ The *Theogony* was translated by Ficino in 1457; the *Works and Days* was commented upon in a series of lectures by Poliziano in 1483; the complete works of Hesiod, translated by Niccolò della Valle, were first published in 1471 and often reprinted during the sixteenth century. As for Aeschylus, the translation of his tragedies appeared first in Venice in 1518, with the imprint of Francesco Asolano.

⁷² A. E. Popham and J. Wilde, *The Italian Drawings at Windsor Castle*, 1950, no. 429, fig. 21.

⁷³ A. Hekler, "Michelangelo und die Antike," in *Wiener Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte*,

admirable study of the body of a youthful giant reclining on a slab, under the powerful fan of the vulture's wings. Soon after the drawing became known to Roman collectors, in 1534, it was copied in crystal by the famous gem cutter Giovanni de' Bernardi da Castel Bolognese, and bronze plaquettes were subsequently made after the intaglio. Around the middle of the sixteenth century Nicholas Beatrizet, a mediocre engraver from Lorraine who worked for some time in Rome, reproduced the drawing in a print (B. 39). This print, as well as the plaquettes, we must believe, brought the composition into the workshops, especially outside Italy.

Although Michelangelo's drawing represented Tityus and not Prometheus, the visual similarity between the punishment of the two Titans made it easy to adapt the composition for either purpose. A conspicuous example is provided by Rubens, who used Michelangelo's type for his splendid Prometheus (Pl. 9d), painted between 1612 and 1618, and to-day in the Philadelphia Museum of Art.⁷⁴

The canvas painted by Titian about 1549-50, and to-day in the Prado, was undoubtedly a Tityus.⁷⁵ It was to accompany canvases representing the other three damned, Sisyphus, Tantalus and Ixion, commissioned by Queen Mary of Hungary for the Great Hall of her palace at Binche in the Netherlands. Its composition served as a model for a print engraved in 1566 by Cornelis Cort, the subject of which, however, is certainly Prometheus (Pl. 9c). The Titan, fastened by chains on a heap of rocks, lies not in the dark recesses of Hades, but under an open sky, with clearly visible clouds, as if on the peak of a mountain, while to the right an abandoned torch sticking out between two slabs points unmistakably to the nature of his crime.⁷⁶ For further clarity a copy engraved after Cort in 1599 by Thomas de Leu (R. Dumesnil X, 71) carried an eloquent distich:

Immortale jecur tondens avis ecce Promethei
Mortalis miseros miser arguit aeris avaros.

Some interesting instances of the influence of the Cort print appear in Flemish painting in the seventeenth century. They are Jordaens' 'Prometheus' (Pl. 9e),⁷⁷ where such props as the fragment of a statue, and Mercury peering from behind a tree, are added to avoid any iconographical confusion; a canvas by Theodore van Baburen showing the Titan cast into chains by Vulcan (Pl. 9f);⁷⁸ and a tortured Prometheus by Abraham van Diepenbeeck, known to us through an engraving by Cornelis Bloemaert.⁷⁹

VII-VIII, 1930-32, p. 201 ff.

⁷⁴ See L. v. Puyvelde, *Rubens*, 1952, p. 58 and p. 116, and F. Kimball, "Rubens' Prometheus," in *Burlington Magazine*, CXIV, 1952, pp. 66-70.

⁷⁵ H. Tietze, *Titian*, 2nd ed., 1950, p. 382, fig. 202, and *Museo del Prado*, Madrid, 1952, p. 666, no. 427. See also E. Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology*, 1939, pp. 214-16, where the identification of Titian's Tityus in the Prado is definitely established.

⁷⁶ J. C. J. Bierens de Haan, in *L'oeuvre*

gravé de Cornelis Cort, 1948, no. 192: "Cette belle estampe figurait parmi les pièces de Cort envoyées par Tiziano à Lampsonius. D'après le tableau de 1549-50, en sens inverse, brûlé dans l'incendie du Palais Pardo; une autre (copie?) au Musée du Prado à Madrid."

⁷⁷ Cologne, *Wallraf-Richartz Museum Catal.*, 1927, no. 1014.

⁷⁸ Utrecht, *Stedelijk Museum*, *Catalogue der schilderijen*, 1933, no. 3, pl. 35.

⁷⁹ The Bloemaert print, engraved before

Another factor that contributed to the revival of the story of Prometheus in the Renaissance is represented by the influence of the Italian mythographers. These writers often speak of the Titan, summarizing both ancient and modern interpretations and adding new ingenious moralizations. Piero Valeriano mentions him in the *Hieroglyphica* as a symbol of "Heavenly punishment" or, if he carries a ring, a symbol of "Gratitude," while the woodcut (Pl. 10f) illustrating the passage shows a youthful giant striding under the skies from which he boldly grasps a bolt of lightning.⁸⁰ Natale Conti draws a quite unexpected parallel between the evils caused to mankind by Prometheus' disobedience and the evils—war, destruction and massacre—caused by Protestant heresy, the modern example of sinful arrogance of spirit.⁸¹ Finally, Cartari, in his *Immagini dei Dei degli Antichi* (1556), suggests an interesting comparison between Prometheus and the artist. Prometheus' ascent to the sky with the assistance of Minerva in order to get the fire necessary to the arts is explained thus: "in tutte le arti due cose facciano di bisogno. L'una è l'industria, e la inventione, l'altra il porre in opera, e fare quello, che lo ingegno ha disegnato. Quella s'intende per Minerva e questo per Volcano, ciò pel fuoco . . ."⁸²

Such an interpretation readily evokes the Mannerist opposition between *invenzione* and *opera*, and is not by accident contemporary with some allegorical cycles of decoration where the Titan plays an important rôle. When in 1570 Vasari was asked to draw up a plan for the decoration of the Studio of Francesco de' Medici in the Palazzo Vecchio, he accepted the suggestion of Don Vincenzo Borghini to illustrate the subject of Nature and Art by a series of allegorical paintings representing the various arts and crafts, the four temperaments and the four elements, culminating in a central panel of the ceiling showing Nature offering gold and fire to Prometheus, father of all the arts, "il primo inventore delle pietre preziose, et degli anelli, come testimonia Plinio, et che perciò dette occasione alla favola dell'essere legato nel monte Caucaso mentre che vi s'affatica grandemente intorno con infinita industria per cavarne i Diamanti et altre gioie"⁸³ (Pl. 10c).

Another example of the strange reversion to the spirit of the mediaeval mythological treatises that marks the allegorical imagination of the Late Renaissance can be found in a cycle painted by one of Vasari's pupils, Jacopo Zucchi, in the Palazzo Ruccellai-Ruspoli in Rome about 1600. In one of the panels Minerva is shown flanked by Vulcan and Prometheus. The Titan, bearded and bold, with the noble features of a St. Paul, carries the statuette of a man in one hand and a burning torch in the other, "la face accesa dal celeste fuoco avuto per mezzo di Minerva."⁸⁴ Much in the same way he had

1638, was later used as one of the plates illustrating Michel de Marolles' *Tableaux du temple des Muses . . . tirées du cabinet du feu Mr. Favreau*, published in 1655.

⁸⁰ *Hieroglyphica*, Basle, 1556: "Eruditi cuius-dam Promethei sive ingenium vel intelligentiae vis."

⁸¹ *Mythologiae sive explicationis fabularum Libri X*, Paris, 1583, IV, cap. 6.

⁸² *Le imagini . . . degli dei degli antichi*, Venice,

1580, p. 11 ff.

⁸³ Borghini's *invenzione* is published by A. della Vita, *Lo Zibaldone di Giorgio Vasari*, in *Il Vasari*, I, 1927, p. 39 ff.

⁸⁴ J. Zucchi, *Discorso sopra li dei de' gentili e le loro imprese*, Rome, 1602, ed. F. Saxl, *Antike Götter in der Spätrenaissance: ein Freskenzyklus und ein Discorso des Jacopo Zucchi*, Leipzig, 1927.

been represented "tutto grave e venerando . . . con una statuetta di terra nell'una delle mani, e con una face accesa nell'altra" in the festive procession organized in Florence in 1565 for the wedding of Francesco de' Medici.⁸⁵

At about the same date Pellegrino Tibaldi had also used the subject of Prometheus animating his statue for a fresco which he painted over a fireplace in the Palazzo Fava at Bologna. Malvasia in his description of this fresco reports that the main scene was surrounded by a frieze showing the "ardito Statuario" tied to the rocks of Caucasus, together with episodes from the story of Epimetheus and Pandora.⁸⁶ The amusing idea of associating the fire of Prometheus with a fireplace was evidently a favourite one in Emilia, for it was repeated later on by Ludovico Carracci on a fireplace in the Casa Casali at Bologna,⁸⁷ and by Guercino in the Casa Fabri at Cento.⁸⁸

Yet much more profound and original than the rather banal parallelism between the two fires, was another turn given to the story of Prometheus in the Carracci circle. There, the old interpretation of Prometheus as the archetype of the artist was for the first time fused with the Neoplatonic concept of the fire as divine wisdom and virtue, as it had appeared in the writings of Boccaccio, Ficino and Achille Bocchi. It was for this specific symbolical purpose that the image of Prometheus the creator was employed in the funeral ceremonies for Agostino Carracci in 1602. In front of the church where the funeral was to take place, the members of the Accademia degli Intronati erected an emblematic pillar decorated with allegorical statues and three vertical rows of grisaille panels accompanied by devices. The centre of this arrangement was occupied by an unfinished canvas left by Agostino, which showed a head of Christ and carried the motto *Sic veniet*. Directly beneath this canvas hung a grisaille painted by Alessandro Albini, representing Prometheus as he descends from heaven with Minerva to give life and spirit to his statue. This panel was inscribed with the motto *Sunt commercia coeli*, to signify that—in the words of Malvasia—*Agostino accompagnato da profondo sapere, con virtu soprahumana dava lo spirito e la forza all'opere sue*.⁸⁹ Thus Prometheus,

⁸⁵ Vasari, *Vite* (Milanesi), VII, p. 593.

⁸⁶ C. C. Malvasia, *Felsina Pittrice*, 1678, I, p. 193. This combination of the myth of Prometheus with that of Pandora is extremely rare. Although the two stories are so closely connected, artists hardly ever represented them together as a cycle. Another instance seems to have been a fresco by G. B. Zelotti in the Palazzo Foscari at Moranzano, so described by Ridolfi: ". . . e nella quarta stanza è Prometeo, che furato il fuoco del Cielo, sen vola in terra a portar la cogia de' mali. Quindi è, che si veggono molti infermi giacenti sul terreno." (*Le meraviglie dell'arte*, ed. v. Hadeln, 1914, I, p. 381.) I was unfortunately unable to discover whether this particular fresco is preserved. From this description it would seem that, although Pandora is not explicitly mentioned, there was a combination of the story of Prometheus descending from heaven with the fire which,

indirectly, was to bring misery to mankind, and that of Pandora also descending from heaven with her fatal box.

⁸⁷ C. C. Malvasia, *op. cit.*, I, p. 495.

⁸⁸ [O. C. Righetti], *Le pitture di Cento*, 1758, p. 28: "Sopra d'un cammino la Storia di Prometeo, che preso il fuoco del Cielo con una faccella accesa ad un Uomo di fango formato, infonde l'anima." In the same allegorical vein, Prometheus as the symbol of human ingenuity and especially as discoverer of fire most curiously finds its way even into the scientific treatise of the learned Athanasius Kircher, *Ara Magna Lucis et Umbrae* (1644), where, in Book VII—*Prometheus, sive Ars Anacampтика vel Astronomia reflexa*, the old image of *Prometheus sapiens* is applied to Kircher's observations on the reflection of light.

⁸⁹ C. C. Malvasia, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 414 and 415, fig. 4. The name of Pandora given to the statue comes from Boccaccio's *De Pandora*



Foto GFN

a—Domenichino, 'Prometheus and Minerva,' 1602, Palazzo Farnese, Rome (p. 61)



Foto GFN

b—Domenichino, 'Prometheus Freed by Hercules,' 1602, Palazzo Farnese, Rome (p. 61)



c—Francesco Morandini, 'Prometheus receiving the Gifts of Nature,' 1570, Palazzo Vecchio, Florence (p. 59)



d—Prometheus, from Whitney, *Choice of Emblems*, Leyden, 1585 (p. 62)



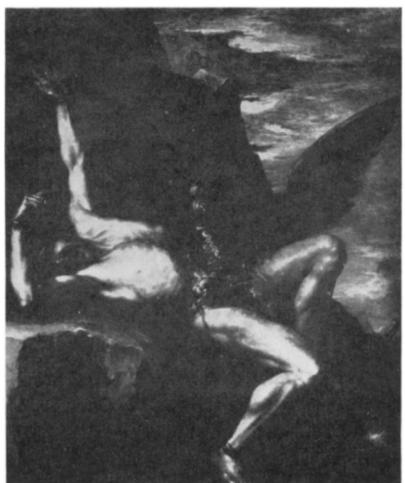
e—N. S. Adam, 'Prometheus Tortured,' 1762, Louvre (p. 62)



f—Prometheus grasping the fire from the sun; from Valeriano's *Hieroglyphica*, 1556 (p. 59)



g—Luca Giordano, 'The Birth of Man,' 1680, Detail from ceiling of Palazzo Medici-Riccardi, Florence (p. 61)



h—Salvator Rosa, 'The Torture of Prometheus,' Galleria Nazionale,

who had been seen by Cartari as a symbol of the artist in a purely intellectual sense, became here an image of the truly Christian artist.

The Carracci's familiarity with the myth of Prometheus' creation of man and its symbolic implications also appears from the employment of this subject in the programme in the Farnese Gallery in Rome. There, two panels of the series painted by Domenichino after designs by Annibale Carracci⁹⁰ refer to our story. One is Prometheus showing his lifeless statue to Minerva who, in answer, points to the heavens (Pl. 10a); the other Hercules liberating the Titan (Pl. 10b). Bellori, who is the first to write about the moral meaning underlying the fables depicted in the Gallery, sees in the paintings of this series illustrations of Virtue or *Amor Divino*, as opposed to the stories of profane Love painted by Annibale on the vault of the gallery. Following Bellori, Malvasia gives even further details: Minerva pointing to the heavens signifies that without the virtue of our soul we are nothing but mud, and Hercules killing Prometheus' eagle shows that virtue by defeating vice frees our soul from the grip of the passions and from the tortures caused by them.⁹¹

We may safely assume that this adaptation to the moralizing spirit so dear to Bellori and to the circles he represented accounts for the fact that during the seventeenth century the episodes concerned with the formation and animation of man are depicted more often in Italy than in the North. One especially interesting example, where the imagination of the mythographers seems to be revived and carried to the last extreme, is the elaborate composition illustrating the story of human life painted by Luca Giordano in 1680 on the ceiling of a room in the Palazzo Medici-Riccardi in Florence (Pl. 10g). Here, in the centre of a circle formed by a gigantic serpent biting its tail—a symbol of eternity—Janus presents to Clotho the material for the thread of a new life, while a winged soul is surrounded by a host of other allegorical characters—Lachesis, Atropos, Nature, Time, Chaos and Fortune—and Prometheus, in the shape of a youthful genius, descends from the heavens, carrying his torch ablaze with the sacred flame.

On the other hand, while these moralistic and allegorical representations corresponded to the taste of the time, it is hardly surprising that Baroque painters were attracted by the formal possibilities offered by the subject of Prometheus attacked by the eagle. The popularity of Rubens' heroic Prome-

homine a Prometheo facto based upon Fulgentius Planciades (*Genealogiae deorum gentilium* . . . , Venice, 1494, lib. IV, cap. 45).

⁹⁰ Hans Tietze pointed out that these compositions are after two of Annibale's drawings in the Louvre (7195 and 7208), in his article on the Farnese Gallery in *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen des allher. Kaiserhauses*, 26, 1906-07, p. 153.

⁹¹ G. Bellori, *Le vite de' pittori, scultori ed architetti moderni* . . . , Rome, 1728, p. 34, and C. C. Malvasia, *op. cit.*, I, p. 440. From the compositional point of view, the figure of Prometheus in the scene of the liberation repeats Titian's scheme of the overthrown giant with his legs outlined against the sky

(here they are silhouetted against the rock). It would seem that Annibale Carracci also illustrated the story of Prometheus on other occasions: when Malvasia describes the collection of the Palazzo Ercolani in Bologna, he mentions "il Prometeo di Annibale Carracci," as if it were a well-known painting (*Pitture . . . di Bologna*, 1792, p. 314); and a drawing by the younger Michel Corneille in the Louvre, showing Prometheus sitting outside his sculptor's shop and chiselling a statue with Minerva as his adviser, may also reflect, in my view, a lost composition by Annibale (J. Guiffrey, P. Marcel, *Inventaire général des dessins . . . , Ecole française*, 1909, III, p. 89, no. 2391).

theus, which served as a model for a Prometheus by Gerard Seghers now in the Museum at Lille⁹² and another by Theodor Rombouts, in the Musée Royal de Peinture et de Sculpture at Brussels,⁹³ as well as the diffusion of the Cornelis Cort print after Titian which we mentioned before, certainly contributed to this interest. But one should also admit that the representation of a powerful body racked with inhuman suffering must have appeared as an ideal example of those violent "moti dell'animo" that were so important to seventeenth-century artists. Lomazzo had already pointed out that Prometheus, as well as Laocoön, can express the distortions that unbearable pain brings to a human body. The precision of the passage in which he describes Prometheus is such that it deserves being quoted in full:

La prima passione adunque è il dolore, il quale secondo il tormento che si pate, fa muovere il corpo in atti dolenti. Il che descrivendo Achille Statio nella persona di Prometeo legato allo scoglio con l'avoltoio che gli becca il fegato dice che ritirava adietro il ventre, et il costato, et a suo danno raccoglieva la coscia. Perciò che riconduceva l'Uccello al fegato, et l'incontro l'altro suo piede distendeva a basso i nervi diritti fino all'estremità delle dita, dimostrando anco dolore nel resto del corpo con inarcar le ciglia, stringer le labbra, et discoprire i denti.⁹⁴

It is characteristic that the generic, literary idea of the "torturato" of the illustrated editions of Alciati and Whitney published during the second half of the sixteenth century (Pl. 10d) is here transformed into an almost scientific study of a body subject to a pathological condition. In spite of the difference in date, the passage of Lomazzo readily calls to mind Salvator Rosa's gruesome and realistic Prometheus, painted in 1665 and displayed to the admiration of all Rome (Pl. 10h).⁹⁵ Such an example not only represents the climax of the Baroque exaltation of the tortured nude, but also indicates the direction in which the theme was to be continued during the next hundred years. Perhaps the marble statue by Nicholas Sébastien Adam (Pl. 10e), which was accepted by the Académie in 1762, but the model for which was made as early as 1738, may serve as a typical example of the persistence and formalization of this violently Baroque interpretation of Prometheus' torture well into the eighteenth century.

⁹² F. Benoit, *La peinture au Musée de Lille*, 1909, I, no. 17, pl. 25.

⁹³ D. Roggen, *Theodor Rombouts in Gentse Bijdragen tot de Kunstgeschiedenis*, XII, 1949-50, pp. 225-27, ill.

⁹⁴ P. Lomazzo, *Trattato dell'arte della Pittura*, 1585, pp. 165-6.

⁹⁵ See L. Ozzola, *Vita e opere di Salvator Rosa*, 1908, p. 23.